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Dioxin level greater than expected

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SAUGET — Dioxin contamination at a site in Sauget is more serious than initially believed, the results of 20 soil samples show.

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency announced Friday that some samples taken from a site near the Sauget sewage treatment plant contain concentrations of nearly 100 parts per billion of dioxin. Seven of 20 samples tested have more than the federally set limit of 1 part per billion that is considered hazardous to health, the IEPA announced.

in Sauget

"These findings are cause for some concern, and I want to assure everyone that a full investigation will be conducted," said IEPA Director Richard J. Carlson.

Despite the high concentrations of dioxin, the situation was called a "localized problem" by a regional IEPA spokesman.

"It's in what I would describe as a localized area," said Kenneth Mensing, the IEPA regional land pollution control manager. The dioxin is located in an approximately 300 square-foot area where

an oil storage tank was formerly located, he said. The tank had been used by Russell Bliss, an Ellisville, Mo., waste-oil dealer who has been connected to dioxin contamination at several sites in Missouri.

The Illinois Attorney General's office has filed suit against Bliss and his son's firm, Jerry Russell Bliss Inc., in connection with the dioxin contamination.

As a result of the findings, construction work will continue to be delayed on one part of a new \$100 million regional sewage treatment plant. Construction crews halted work a month ago on a pump station at the

site because trace amounts of dioxin were found.

Construction of the new sewage treatment plant building, located several thousand feet south of the area where dioxin has been found, will continue, officials said. Asked whether the dioxin problem will delay construction of the entire project, Sauget village spokesman Harold Baker said Friday, "at this juncture, I don't think so."

Village of Sauget officials were told during a meeting Friday to come up with a plan to deal with the problem.

"We talked about a lot of things, and the

village will come back with a plan, which will be reviewed, and then we'll come up with follow-up tasks. We will meet again next week," he said.

Mensing said any plan "will include some kind of cleanup, but as to what form it will take, it's too early to talk about that."

Of the 20 soil sample results announced Friday, 13 contained dioxin concentrations of 1 part per billion or less, while seven samples showed concentrations ranging from 1 to 97 parts per billion. The type of dioxin found is known as TCDD 2-3-7-8, which is described as being the most toxic dioxin produced.